

Washington, DC - As part of her continuing efforts to provide students with safe schools, Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA), along with Vernon J. Ehlers (R-MI), introduced the “Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act” in Congress today. The bill would allow schools to use existing federal funding specifically for bullying and gang prevention programs.

“Bullying and harassment are problems that will only get bigger if we don’t put a stop to it,” said Rep. Sánchez. “Three-quarters of all school shooting incidents have been linked to bullying and harassment, and victims of bullying and harassment are more likely to be depressed or suicidal. This is a need we can address to help keep our kids safe and in school.”

Research has shown that bullying and harassment are serious problems that impede students’ academic progress and overall mental health. Nearly one-third of all students are bullied at least once a month and one out of every ten high school drop-outs left school because of repeated bullying.

Fortunately, studies have also shown that comprehensive, school-wide programs designed to change norms for behavior can significantly reduce bullying and gang activity. The “Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act” would help schools become safer by ensuring they can use federal funds for such programs, including school-based counseling and referral services, emergency intervention programs, and telephone hotlines for the victims of bullies and gangs. Safer schools will help increase student attendance and academic achievement.

“Bullying is not just harmless horseplay among kids, but a serious problem in many schools in the country,” said Rep. Ehlers. “Bullying distracts from students’ education and can lead to future violence if school officials and parents do not intervene. This bill will give schools the tools to identify bullying and gang problems, and provide emergency intervention programs so schools can intervene before someone is seriously hurt or killed. It also will provide counseling and help to victims so they are less likely to retaliate with violence or turn to gangs for protection.”

Currently, the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA), which is a part of the No Child Left Behind Act intended to prevent school violence, does not mention bullying or harassment, and contains only a few fleeting references to gang violence. Reps. Ehlers and Sánchez’ bill would amend SDFSCA to allow schools to use funding they receive from SDFSCA to implement comprehensive programs to prevent bullying, harassment, and gang activity.

The “Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act” is a part of Rep. Sánchez’ “Safe Kids Agenda,” a set of legislation designed to keep children safe inside and outside of school. The Safe Kids Agenda also includes the “Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act,” introduced with Reps. Edolphus Towns and Jared Polis, and two other pieces of legislation, the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Cyberbullying Prevention Act, that Sánchez will be introducing soon.